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SUBJECT: ISTANBUL TO HOST WORLD WATER FORUM 2009

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. Even as the country enjoyed sunshine instead of rain (reftel), Istanbul hosted a preparatory meeting for the World Water Forum 2009, an international, tri-annual meeting organized to highlight water needs and resources worldwide since 1997. Istanbul was chosen as venue for the 2009 meeting during the convocation in Mexico last year. Speakers representing the organization's permanent leadership tended to reflect most passionately the themes of dire water need around the world. End summary.

THE PLACE

¶2. (SBU) Turkey's representative on the umbrella organization's, World Water Council (WWC), board of governors, Professor Veysel Eroglu, currently Director General of Turkey's State Hydraulic Works, said he successfully pushed for holding the 2009 Water Forum in Istanbul during the 2006 WWF gathering in Mexico. As past director of Istanbul's Water and Sewerage Administration 1994-2002 during then-Mayor Tayyip Erdogan's administration, 1994-1998, the city had advanced from water distribution every 15th day in some locales to distribution and quality at "international standards," he claimed. The Forum in 2009 should mark a turning point for Istanbul, Eroglu said with additional accomplishments; there would be a "before and after" effect. While not naming a completion date, ground was broken for a Bosphorus tunnel to link a 185-kilometer channel bringing water from the Menem River in Anatolia to European Istanbul. Eroglu referred to this tunnel and Istanbul's two existing bridges over the Bosphorus as metaphors for Istanbul's role as the link between cultures and continents. Turkey, he said, would work with WWC to hold regional meetings worldwide to advance and prepare for the 2009 Forum in Istanbul, the first of which is to be held in Antalya, Turkey, March 22-24 with an appearance by the Prime Minister. Other regional meetings were already planned for the Balkans, Central Asia, the U.S. and Russia.

THE PASSION

¶3. (SBU) WWC President Loic Fauchon injected intensity into his description of the disaster WWC members see in water distribution worldwide. Water supplies are challenged by pollution, population pressures and global warming and the precious resource is no longer always to be found where it was once routinely expected by planners. Systematic

approaches were critical to combat the consequences of abuse of water reserves. WWC's objective is to "convince those in power that the priority...must be given to water and sanitation because water is the first guarantee for health and education." With two billion people worldwide without running water, political acceptance of the group's goals was a duty. Fauchon did not name a figure but said there was money to prevent the 25 million annual deaths he attributed to water-related disease and drought. "Resource transfers" would be sufficient to respond adequately to the needs in each region of the world. WWC would work through the media and other up-to-date methods of reaching a mass audience to create a powerful lobby to reach political, economic and social decision-makers at all levels to bring about effective decisions.

THE PLAN

¶4. (SBU) With Grand National Assembly Speaker Bulent Arinc, Istanbul Mayor Kadir Topbas and other politicians joining the closing session of the preparatory meeting in the grand entry hallway of the sparkling Dolmabahce Palace, Turkey's hosts seemed to have other points uppermost in mind. A film and speakers showcased Istanbul as home to multiple faiths (Jewish, Christian and Muslim), as well as to successive iterations of powerful civilizations. The film described the special role of water in each of these civilizations, culminating in the Muslim culture and its use of water. Turkish speakers also highlighted Turkey's breathtaking beauty and Istanbul's spectacular monuments punctuated by the cool waters of the Bosphorus with its bridges visually and literally linking Europe and Asia.

¶5. (SBU) Comment. The gathering's closing ceremony at the palace seemed drawn in high definition for politicians seeking a wider stage. WWC's message of ecology came across

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as a bit dull compared to the technicolor presentation covering the host city and country. Turkey does not yet appear to have set up a secretariat to prepare for the 2009 World Water Forum, but will likely draw support staff from large central government offices well practiced at planning and organizing multilateral meetings as well as from the Istanbul Mayor's office. We will work with the Mayor's office as well as with Embassy Ankara to track the development and organization of the secretariat. End Comment.
JONES